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ABSTRACT

It is proposed that the functions of the Mandarin verbal suffix "-le" are three: (1) for marking non-continual factual actions or events; (2) for indicating the "peak" in an event line; and (3) for explicitly marking anteriority of an action or event. Observations of written language drawn from newspaper articles and editorials, textbook lessons, popularized historical tales, natural conversations, and student writing confirm the hypothesis as describing the underlying regularities, with some modifications. While action verbs in a phrase with a classical style are not compatible with this form, monosyllabic verbs require it. In addition, anteriority tends to be explicitly marked by "-le" when the verbs in the series of clauses are not cohesive enough to indicate such a natural sequence and/or when a special emphasis on the order of the events is called for. It is concluded that by comparison with previous work on the discourse function of "-le", the present analysis seems to be made on a more practical basis. (MSE)

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The Discourse Function of the Verbal Suffix -Le in Mandarin*

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ABSTRACT

A tripartite hypothesis is here proposed for the functions of the Mandarin verbal suffix -le: (1) for marking non-continuing factual actions/events, (2) for indicating the 'peak' in an event line, and (3) for explicitly marking anteriority of an action/event.

Observations of actual written data confirm the above hypothesis as underlying regularities. Certain modifications, however, have to be incorporated. While action verbs in a phrase with a classical flavor are not compatible with this -le, monosyllabic action verbs require one. Furthermore, anteriority tends to be explicitly marked by -le when the verbs in the series of clauses are not cohesive enough to indicate such a natural sequence and/or when a special emphasis is called for on the order of the events.

By comparison with previous works on the discourse function of -le, the present hypothesis seems to be able to explain more facts and in a more principled manner.

I. Introduction

The verbal suffix -le in Mandarin is most popularly considered a perfective aspect marker (e.g. Chao, 1968, and Li and Thompson, 1981). As such, it has been given different functions. Chao, Henna, et al (1977) and Rohsenow (1978) recognize its syntactic and/or semantic functions only, while Li and Thompson, Spanos (1979) and Andreason(1981) furnish evidence for its role in narrative discourse. All works are highly scholarly and approach the problem with great care. Even so, there are many instances that are quite inexplicable in any of the treatments so far proposed. We will very briefly review four previous works by way of providing some background for the suffix. The reader is strongly advised to refer to the original sources for more detailed discussion.

Chao (1968:246) essentially treats the verbal suffix -le as a perfective aspect marker in the sense that it has 'the class meaning of completed action'. The suffix certainly often marks a completed action, despite many exceptions. More seriously, his treatment does not offer any way for explaining why -le may be optionally left out in cases like (1) below:

(1) Wǒ zuótiān péngjiàn(-le) yíge péngyou.
I yesterday run-into(-LE) one-M friend
'I ran into a friend yesterday.'

Li and Thompson (1981:185) revise the notion of perfectivity to be an event viewed in its entirety or as a whole. For them, such an event can be described as being 'bounded'. They set forth four ways in which boundedeness of an event may obtain:

(2) by being a quantified event
(3) by being a definite or specified event
(4) by being inherently bounded because of the meaning of the verb
(5) by being the first event in a sequence

Indeed, their analysis is a tremendous improvement over previous ones. But it does not prove to be very helpful in cases like the one in (1) above. The main problem is that they fail to use broad enough contexts to account for the discourse role of -le.

Spanos (1979) takes a very practical approach by using a broad data base. His major findings are summarized in (6) through (9) below.

(6) Principle of Non-Redundancey: -Le tends to be omitted in contexts where the time, aspect, phase, or modality of an action, process, or

state of affairs is already specified.

(7) Rule of Consistency: For some speakers, if -le is used in a specific structure, it will always be used in that structure regardless of redundancy.

(8) Rule of Caution: Where the context is insufficient to determine the time, aspect, phase or modality, -le is more likely to appear.

(9) Special rhetorical purposes.

As the study of -le extends from syntax to pragmatics in Spanos, its use or non-use is formulated in terms of tendencies rather than rules (although the word rule still occurs frequently). It would be much more illuminating if motivations were provided for the pragmatic tendencies.

Andreason's study (1981) is done from a discourse point of view. Closely following Hopper (1979) and Li and Thompson (1981), he proposes to treat the verbal suffix -le as one of the typical foregrounding devices in narrative discourse (p. 98). Other such devices include verbal complements, post-objective directional complements, preverbal directional complements, etc. He sums up the general tendencies of using -le as follows: (p. 99)

(10) a. The perfective -le, in general, occurs after the first event in a sequence, but it is not necessarily true that subsequent events in a multi-event sequence are left unmarked for the perfective aspect. Perfective -le may be deleted but verbal complements are still used.

b. It is too strong a statement to say that in spite of clear past-time contexts there is a tendency to use -le before a quantified object. It is more accurate to say that there is a strong tendency to use -le or some perfectiving complement with a quantified object.

Though discourse factors are taken into consideration in Andreason, they are equivocally formulated. Furthermore, the semantic nature of Mandarin action verbs requiring a complement is taken for a doscourse motivation.

In the remainder of this paper, we try to postulate a theory for the discourse functions of the verbal suffix -le by (a) proposing a hypothesis, (b) making observations on some facts from actual data, & (c) interpreting the facts within the proposed framework of the hypothesis. Finally, a brief comparison is made of our analysis with those of Li and Thompson (1981) and Andreason (1981).

II. The Hypothesis

Our basic hypothesis can be briefly stated in three parts as follows:

(11) The verbal suffix -le is basically for marking non-continuing factual actions/events.

By 'factual', we mean what happened, has happened or is happening (if we disregard the time element in the statement). In other words, 'factual' here denotes what has been referred to as 'realis'. Since continuing actions/events are taken care of by the aspect marker zài-, the use of -le in this sense very much resembles that of the English past and perfect tenses.

(12) In terms of discourse, the verbal suffix -le is basically for marking the 'peak' in the event line.[2]

By virtue of its function to indicate factuality, the verbal -le is a natural candidate for this task. The use or non-use of -le in non-peak clauses is variously conditioned by other syntactic, semantic and discourse factors.

(13) In terms of sequencing of events, the verbal suffix -le serves to explicitly mark anteriority.

This means that the verb with -le attached to it is explicitly marked as denoting an action or event that has/had happened before another. In this sense, it is quite like the (past) perfect tense in English, though there is more complication than just that.

III. The Data

We examined an assortment of data from newspaper articles and editorials, textbook lessons, popularized historical tales, natural conversations and student writings. Several phenonema are worth noting.

3.1. Frequency of Occurrence

One of the first things that we noticed is that the clearly identifiable verbal suffix -le is rather infrequently used in all styles---expository, narrative and conversational. The only pieces of writing where -le occurs noticeably more frequently are those from textbooks for foreign learners. The editorials we studied are naturally expository in nature. As can be expected, there are very few instances of -le in these editorials, except for recounting past happenings. In the short stories where an overwhelming number of clauses tell about past happenings, the frequency of occurrence of -le is unexpectedly improportionately low. In one text of over 4,000 running characters, the verbal -le occurs only ten times. In another of about 2,200 running characters, there are 22 occurrences of the verbal suffix. The average frequency of occurrence is once every 198 characters.

On the other hand, in the six short stories for foreign readers, which have a total of about 1,270 running characters, the verbal -le occurs as many as 25 times. Here, the average frequency of occurrence is once every 50 running characters. In other words, the verbal suffix -le occurs about 4 times as often in short texts for foreign readers as in narratives in newspapers.

3.2. Where -Le Occurs

The next thing that attracted our attention is that such instances of -le tend to occur in three positions, as in (14) - (16) below:

(14) Toward the end of a major break in the event line:

這件事辦妥後,姑媽顯得很欣慰,她匆匆地收拾行裝,又用粗白布包了十塊銀洋交給我。("姑媽與我")

Zhèijiàn shì bàntuǒ hòu, gūmā xiǎnde hěn xīnwèi, tā cōngcōng wèi wǒ
this-M matter settle after, aunt appear very relieved, she hurriedly for me

shōushí xíngnáng, yòu yòng cū báibù bāo-le shíkuài
pack baggage, in-addition use course white-cloth wrap-LE ten-M

yínyáng jiāogěi wǒ. (Guma Yu Wo)
silver-dollar hand-to me

'After this matter was settled, (my) aunt appeared greatly relieved. She hurriedly packed (my) baggage for me and in addition handed me ten silver dollars wrapped in coarse white cloth.'

(15) With a verb denoting that the action/event forms a cause-effect relationship with a following action/state/event:

當我僥倖被上了北市一所市立高中，家裡燃放了一串鞭炮，足足高興了好幾天。("一塊錢")

Dāng wo jiǎoxìng kǎoshàng-le Běi-shì yìsuǒ shìlì gāozhōng,
when I luckily admit-LE Taipei-City one-M municipal high-school

jiālǐ ránfàng-le yíchuàn biānpào, zúzú gāoxìng-le háojǐ tiān.
home-LOC set-off-LE one-M fire-cracker, thoroughly happy-LE several day

'When I was, luckily, admitted into a municipal high school in Taipei, my folks set off a string of firecrackers and we were thoroughly immersed in happiness (in a joyful mood) for several days.'

(16) With monosyllabic (action/event) verbs:

a. 你三叔已經到了桂林，我要把你送到桂林去。("姑媽疼我")

Nǐ Sānshú yǐjīng dào-le Guìlín, wǒ yào bǎ nǐ sòngdào Guìlín
you(r) 3rd-Uncle already arrive-LE Guilin, I want BA you send-to Guilin

qù. (Guma Yu Wo)
go

'Your 3rd-Uncle has already arrived in Guilin, (so) I want to send you there.'

b. 手裡有了錢，走在路上也紮實多了("一塊錢")

Shǒulǐ yǒu-le qián, zǒu zài lùshàng, yě zāshí duō le. (Yikuai Qian)
hand-inside have-LE money, walk at road-LOC, also secure much LE

'Having money in my hands, I felt a lot more secure walking on the street.'

c. 從前有一個人，丟了一把斧子...過了幾天，他的斧子找到了。(Start ...)

Cóngqián yǒu ge rén, diū-le yìbǎ fǔzi,...guò-le jǐtiān,
formerly have M person, lose-LE one-M axe,...pass-LE few-day,

tāde fǔzi zhǎodào le. (Start from the Practical)
his axe find LE

'Once upon a time, there was a man who lost his axe.... A few days later, his axe was found...'

3.3. Where -Le Could Occur But Does Not

Another outstanding fact is that there are many potential positions where the verbal suffix -le could occur but does not. The -le's in the parentheses below indicate such positions:

(17) a. 姑媽從信裡抽出(了)一張照片，遞給(了)我一果然是父親與一位女士的合照。("姑媽疼我")

Gūmā cóng xìnlǐ chōuchū(-le) yìzhāng zhàopiàn, dìgěi(-le)
aunt from letter-inside pull-out(-LE) one-M photo hand-to(-LE)

wǒ---guǒrán shi fùqīn yǔ yíwèi nǚshìde hézhào. (Guma Yu Wo)
I ---indeed be father and one-M lady-DE duo-photo

'(My) aunt took a photo out of the letter and handed it to me---
indeed it was a photo of my father with a lady.'

b. 他們將回(了)佛经以後,明帝爲了貯藏這部珍貴的佛教
经典,便命令(了)工匠,仿照印度佛教寺院的式樣,修建了一
所寺院。("The First Buddhist Temple...)

Tāmen dàihuí-(le) fójīng yǐhòu, Míngdì wèi-le
they bring-back-LE Buddhist-sutras after, Ming-Emperor for-the-sake-of

zhǔcáng zhèbù zhēnguì de fójiào jīngdiǎn, biàn mìnglìng(-le)
preserve this-M precious DE Buddhist sutra-classic, then order(-le)

gōngjiàng fǎngzhào Yìndù fójiào sìyuàn de shìyàng, xiūjiàn-le yìsuǒ
craftsman copy India Buddhist temple DE style, build-LE one-M

sìyuàn. (The First Buddhist Temple...)
temple

'After they brought back the Buddhist sutras, Emperor Ming, in order
to preserve these precious volumes, ordered his craftsmen to build
a temple in the style of Indian Buddhist temples.'

c. 有一天,他忽然想出(了)個"好"辦法,就急急忙忙跑到(了)田
裡,把每棵苗都往上拔了拔。回過頭再看(了)看苗,的確比原
來高了不少。("Helping the Seedlings Grow....")

Yǒu yìtiān, tā hūrán xiǎngchū(-le) ge 'hǎo' bànfǎ, jiù
have one-day, he suddenly think-out(-LE) M 'brilliant' method, then

cōngcōngmángmáng pǎodào(-le) tiánlǐ, bǎ měikē miáo dōu
hurriedly run-to(-LE) field-inside, BA every-M seedling all

wàng shàng bá-le bá. Huíguò tóu zài kàn(-le) kàn miáo,
toward top pull -LE pull. turn head again look(-LE) look seedling,

díquè bǐ yuánlái gāo-le bù shǎo. (Helping the Seedlings Grow...)
indeed BI orginally tall-LE not little

'One day, he suddenly came up with a 'brilliant' idea. So he hurriedly
ran to the field and pulled upward each and every seedling in the field.
(Having done this) he turned around to have another look at the seedlings,
and (felt that) indeed they were much taller than they had been.'

The insertion of -le in each of the positions in (17) would by no means render the clauses unacceptable if acceptability is assessed within the limits of the individual clauses.

3.4. Incompatibility

Finally, certain types of expressions seem to be incompatible with this verbal suffix:

(18) Verbs with a resultative complement introduced by de:

一向沈静的小城，变(*了)得乱烘烘，不胜负荷。("姑妈吴我")

Yíxiàng chénjìng de xiǎo chéng, biàn(*-le)de luànhōnghōng
generally quiet DE small town, become DE messy-noisy

bùshēngfùhè. (Guma Yu Wo)
unbearable

'The small town, usually peaceful and quiet, became unbearably noisy and messy.'

(19) Verbs of saying or asking followed by a direct or indirect quote:

他說(*了)這次訪问有西兩国的友好关係，奠定了基础("A Meaningful Visit")

Tā shuō(*-le) zhècì fǎngwèn wèi liǎng dǎng liǎng guó de yǒuhǎo guānxī
he say this-time visit for two party two country DE friendly relation

diàndìng-le jīchǔ. (A Meaningful Visit...)
build-LE foundation

'He said that this visit had (helped) build a solid foundation for the friendly relationship of the two parties and the two countries.'

(20) Expressions with some classical flavor:

a. 飲泣(*了)不止；如泉水般涌(*了)出。("姑妈吴我")

yǐnqì(*-le) bùzhǐ — rú quánshuǐ-bān yǒng(*-le) chū
sob-cry not-stop — like spring-water-wise ooze out
'sobbing without stop' — 'oozing out like spring water'

b. 畢業(*了)後 (cf.畢業了以後 or 畢了業以後)。("一塊錢")

bìyè(*-le) hòu (cf. bìyè-le yǐhòu or bì-le yè yǐhòu)
graduate after
'Upon graduation...'

有(*了)錢時 (cf.有了錢的時候)。("一塊錢")

yǒu(*-le) qián shí (cf. yǒu-le qián de shíhòu)
have money time
'When (one) has money...'

The observations in Sections 3.1 - 3.4 naturally lead us to the suspicion that the associated facts may very well reflect some systematic underlying principles that govern the use and non-use of the verbal suffix -le in discourse texts.

IV. Interpretation

In our interpretation, we will be doing two things at the same time: (i) interpreting the data by fitting them in the framework that have been generally

accepted in discourse analysis, and (ii) checking on our hypothesis by applying it to the data and proposing refinements. Then, in the next section, we will discuss some previous works on the verbal -le in the light of our new proposal.

4.1. The Peak and -Le

The fact that the verbal suffix -le occurs toward the end of a story line may be given a natural explanation if we assume that one of its discourse functions is to mark the peak clause of a segment. This device seems to be a consequence of the nature of the language, i.e. Mandarin Chinese (or the other Chinese dialects, for that matter) favors a linear sequencing that follows the temporal or logical order of events. (Cf. Tai, 1985.) For example, the order of the English clauses in the following would be very awkward, if not impossible, in Chinese:

(21) a. Come by my place after you have visited with him.

b. He flunked because he didn't study hard enough.

At best, such second clauses in Chinese sound like afterthoughts added to the main idea in the first clause. This natural order in Chinese necessitates marking the last clause in a sequence of events as the most salient or prominent part in the event line of a narrative. Examples abound:

(22) a. 於是,明帝便派遣了蔡愔和秦景兩個官員到了印度去,求取了佛经。他們走到了現在阿富汗的一個地方,得到了佛經和佛像。("The First Buddhist Temple ...")

Yúshì, Míngdì biàn pàiqiǎn Càiyīn hé Qínjīng liǎngge
consequently, Ming-Emperor then send Caiyin and Qinjing two-M

guānyuán dào Ø Yìndù qù, qiúqǔ fójīng. Tāmen zǒudào Ø
official to India go, search Buddhist sutra. they arrive-at

xiànzài Āfùhàn de yíge dìfāng, dédào-le fójīng hé
now Afghanistan DE one-M place. acquire-LE Buddhist-sutra and

fóxiàng. (The First Buddhist Temple...)
Buddhist-statue

'Thereupon, Emperor Ming sent two officials, Caiyin and Qinjing, to India to search for the Sutras. When they came to a place known today as Afghanistan, they found the Sutras and a Buddhist statue.'

b. 近年来,随着中外文化交流事業的發展,北京烤鴨和"全聚德"店号,也飄洋過了海傳到了国外,使就使更多的人嘗到了味香色美的北京烤鴨了。("Peking Roast Duck")

Jìnniánlái suízhe Zhōng-wài wénhuà jiāoliú shìyè
recent-year-come along-with Sino-foreign culture exchange business

de fāzhǎn, Běijīng kǎoyā hé 'Quán-Jù-Dé' diànhào, yě
DE development, Beijing roast-duck and 'Quan-Ju-De' store-name, also

piāo Ø yáng guò Ø hǎi chuándào Ø guówài, zhè jiù shǐ
float ocean cross sea transmit country-outside, this then enable

gèngduō de rén chángdào-le wèi-xiāng-sè-měi de
even-more DE people taste-LE delicious-and-splendid-looking DE

Běijīng kǎoyā le. (Peking Roast Duck)
Beijing roast-duck LE

'Recently, along with the cultural exchange between China and other countries, the Peking roast duck and Quan-Ju-De, crossing the seas and oceans, went abroad. This made it possible for more people to (be able to) taste the delicious and splendid-looking Peking roast-duck.'

c. 两国政党领导人交换中意见，交流中经验，加深了解。("A Meaningful Visit")

Liǎngguó zhèngdǎng lǐngdǎorén jiāohuàn Ø yìjiàn, jiāoliú
two-country government-party leader exchange view-point inter-flow

Ø jīngyàn, jiāshēn-le liǎojiě.
experience, deepen-Le understanding

'The government and party leaders of the two countries exchanged their views, interfaced their experiences, and reached an improved mutual understanding.'

In the examples, -le occurs only with the last action/event verb in a sequence of two or more such verbs. Positions marked with Ø are potential slots for the suffix to occur.

This function of -le is very much comparable to the Japanese paragraphing device of marking the culminating event with a finite verb and the preliminary event(s) with either a stem or a particle (ga or to) in procedural discourse (Hinds, 1979: 146-9). As a matter of fact, English has a similar morphological device to achieve the same effect. For example, (22) may be translated into English in different ways:

(23) a. Thereupon, Emperor Ming sent two officials, Cai and Qin, {to / to go to} India {for / to find} the Sutras. They found the Sutras and a portrait of the Buddha {at / when they came to} what is Afghanistan today.

b. Recently, along with the cultural exchange between China and other countries the Peking roast duck and Quan-Ju-De {, crossing the seas / crossed the seas and} {and oceans, / oceans and} went abroad. This made it possible for more people to (be able to) taste the delicious and splendid-looking Peking duck.

c. The party and government leaders of the two countries {, by exchanging / exchanged} their views {and interfacing / , interfaced} their experiences, {reached / and reached} an improved mutual understanding.

The use of prepositions or non-finite verbs in the above translations reduces the events expressed by them to a less status. On the other hand, the finite verb in the last position of each sequence. becomes more prominent and thus represents a culminating event. The verbal -le in the Chinese paragraphs in (22) serves the same purpose, marking the 'peak' of a sequence of events. The differences between Chinese and English seem to be the following. First, while a sequence of events may contain only one peak marked by -le in Chinese, the same sequence may be broken up and expressed by more than one finite verb in English. The reason is that Chinese is discourse-oriented but English is sentence-oriented, where the demand of the sentence structure may override the necessity of the paragraph structure. This is seen in the use of two sentences in each of the translations in (23.a) and (23.b). Secondly, the culminating sub-event always seems to occur toward the end of of a Chinese paragraph. But in an English passage, they may not follow this temporal order of events and a temporally or logically prior event may occupy a position following others, e.g.

(23) b'. ...the Peking roast duck went abroad by crossing the seas and oceans.

The arguments in this sub-section also explains why the verbal -le does not always occur where it could, as pointed out in (17).

4.2. Anteriority and -Le

The fact that the verbal -le marks a cause-effect relationship, such as in (15), can be accounted for by broadening the definition of anteriority to include both temporal and logical relations. Thus, without the first two -le's, the paragraph in (15) would be representing three separate events in a sequence with the last one as the culmination. But the three events would seem to have just happened one after another, because the verbs are not cohesive in the sense that they do not meet any of the three lexical cohesive criteria: repetition, synonymy and collocation.[3]

(Note that the verbs in each of the paragraphs in (22) ARE cohesive.) The -le's here overtly mark both the temporal and logical orders of the events. Other examples are:

(24) a. 孫權不作調查,就听信了谗言,下令把張休逮捕下獄.(Stories..., Vol. 20, p.70)

Sūnquán búzuò diàochá, jiù tīngxìn-le chányán
Sunquan not-do investigation, right-away listen-believe-LE malicious-talk

xiàlìng bǎ Zhāngxiū dǎibǔ xiàyù.
order BA Zhangxiu arrest jail

'Sunquan believed the malicious talk he heard without further investigation and ordered to have Zhangxiu arrested and put in jail.'

b. 几年之後,諸葛亮的政策大見成效,蜀國恢復了元氣,兵強馬壯,粮食充足.(Stories..., Vol. 20, p.111)

Jǐ nián zhīhòu, Zhūgěliàng de zhèngcè dàjiànchéngxiào, Shǔguó
few year later, Zhugeliang DE policy greatly-effective, Shu-kingdom

huīfù-le yuánqì, bīngqiáng mǎzhuàng, liángshí chōngzú.
recover-LE spirit, soldier-strong horse-sturdy, food sufficient

'A few years later, Zhugeliang's policy proved to be greatly effective. (As a result,) the Kingdom of Shu recuperated, with its soldiers stout, horses strong, and food supplies abundant.'

c. 金大班听見了這句话,且在舞廳門口,剎住了脚,讓那群嘰嘰呱呱的舞娘魚貫而入,進了舞廳後,.... (Andreason, 185-6)

Jīndàbān tīngjiàn-le zhèjù huà, qiě zài wǔtīng
Jin-captain hear-LE this-M speech, thereupon at dance-hall

ménkǒu shàzhù-le jiǎo, ràng nèiqún jījīguāguā de wǔniáng
doorway stop-LE foot, let that-group giggling DE taxi-dancer

yúguànérrù, jìn-le wǔtīng hòu...
fish-row-and-enter, wnter-LE dance-hall after

'(Upon) hearing this, (taxi-dancer) Captain Jin brought her feet to a sudden halt at the doorway of the dance hall. (And after) she let the swarm of taxi-dancers walk into the dance hall like fish swimming in a line,...'

4.3. Requirement of -Le with Monosyllabic Verbs

We observed that monosyllabic (action/event) verbs, almost without exception, are suffixed with -le. The reason can be found in the fact that Chinese action verbs generally express attainment of goal by an accompanying resultative complement, e.g. kàn 'to look' vs. kànjiàn 'to see', xiě 'to write' vs. xiě wán 'to write (and) finish'. In actuality, simple action verbs don't even presuppose an

active attempt without any aspect marker (cf. Chu, 1976). It is thus natural for monosyllabic action/event verbs, which are by nature simple ones, to combine with the realis marker -le in a narrative to recount what happened. Such examples occur in all types of writing, in all positions of a discourse, and even in the title of a magazine:

(25) a. 華太媽在枕頭底下，摸了半天，掏出一包洋錢，交給了[他]。(Andreason, 174)

Huá Dàmā zài zhěntóu dǐxià tāo-le bàntiān tàochū yìbāo
Hua Dama at pillow underneath grope-LE half-day pull-out one-M

yángqián, jiāogěi-le [tā].
silver-dollar hand-to-LE [he]

'Hua Dama fumbled under the pillow for a long time, pulled out a packet of silver dollars and gave [it] to [him].'

b. 〈為了孩子〉("Cui-Ping-Shan Village...")

'Wèi-le Háizi'
for-LE children
'For the Sake of Children'

c. 這個村去年花了三万多元，蓋了十間房，辦起学前班和小学班，...
("Cui-Ping-Shan Village...")

Zhège cūn qùnián huā-le sān-wàn duō yuán, gài-le
this-M village last-year spend-LE 30,000 more-than dollar, build-LE

shíjiān fáng, bànqǐ xuéqiánbān hé xiǎoxuébān.
ten-M house, start pre-school-class and elementary-school-class

'Last year, this village spent more than 30,000 dollars to build ten rooms and started pre-school classes and an elementary school.'

d. 到了一個月發薪水的時候，電腦会自動在薪水袋中扣除你半個小時的費用。("Taiwan Plastic Corporation...")

Dào-le yíge yué fā xīnshuǐ de shíhòu, diàndǎo huì zìdòng
arrive-LE one-M month issue salary DE time, computer can automatically

zài xīnshuǐ dài zhōng kòuchú nǐ bànge xiǎoshí de fèiyòng.
at salary envelop inside deduct you half-M hour DE expense

'Every month when you receive the paycheck, (you'll find that) the computer has automatically deducted the half-hour expense from your salary.'

Some cases involving a word like a monosyllabic verb, however, are more formulaic than anything else, e.g. wèile 為了 'for the sake', chúle 除了 'except'. Others involving state verbs like yǒule 有了 'to have got' seem to border on the change-of-state use, such as (16.b) in Section 3.2.

4.4. The Non-Occurrence of -Le

We observed in Section 3.4 the non-occurrence of the suffix -le with verbs of saying and asking when followed by a quote or with verbs followed by 'de + resultative complement'. The verbs in both structures can be legitimately considered non-peak elements , the peak being what follows. A similar claim for the resultative complement was first made in Tai and Chen (1974) and has hitherto been widely accepted. The present claim is an extension of theirs from a syntactic to a discourse perspective. The verbs of saying/asking seem to present a problem, especially in view of Halliday's formulation (1985:227-234) of indirect speech ('reporting' in his terms) having a hypotactic (i.e. subordinate) structure vs. direct speech ('quoting' in his terms) having a paratactic (i.e. coordinate) structure. However, there is no reason why both direct and indirect speech in Chinese cannot be uniformly treated as having a paratactic structure. In this sense, verbs of saying/asking may very well be in a non-peak position if the quoted direct speech or reported indirect speech is the peak. For example:

(26) 姑媽興奮地緊握着來信,噙着淚水,對我說ゆ:「芸芸,真是天意!你三叔已经到了桂林,我要把你送到桂林去,讓三叔帶你先去海南島,我便安心了。」(「姑媽哭我」)

Gūmā xīngfènde jǐnwòzhe láixìn, qínzhe lèishuǐ, duì wǒ
Aunt excitedly tight-hold-ZHE come-letter, hold-ZHE tears, to I

shuō Ø: 'Yúnyún, zhēn shi tiānyì! Nǐ Sān-shú yǐjīng
say : 'Yunyun, indeed be heaven-will! you(r) 3rd-Uncle already

dào-le Guìlín, wǒ yào bǎ nǐ sòng dào guìlín qù, ràng Sān-shú
arrive-LE Guilin, I want BA you send to Guilin go, let 3rd-Uncle

dài nǐ xiān qù Hǎinán dǎo, wǒ biàn fàngxīn le.'
take you first go Hainan Island, I then stop-worrying LE

'Excitedly, Aunt held the letter tight and with tears held-back in her eyes, said to me: 'Yunyun, this is indeed God's will! Your 3rd Uncle has already arrived in Guilin. I want to send you there and let him take you to Hainan Island. (This way) I won't have to worry any more.'

It is, however, not completely impossible for the suffix -le to occur with verbs of saying/asking followed by a quote. In our data, at least one case is recorded when the clause in question serves as a cause for another.[4]

The even lesser degree of compatibility of the -le with expressions having a classical flavor is a natural consequence of the late emergence of the suffix in the history of the language.

4.5. Summary of Interpretation

The facts about the clearly identifiable cases of the verbal -le in Section 3 seem to be incompatible with previous theories of the suffix. With the tripartite hypothesis proposed in Section 2, we have tried to offer a more reasonable account of these facts from a discourse perspective. In the next section, we will attempt an assessment of the previous theories of the suffix, namely, those of Li and Thompson (1981) and Andreason (1981) on the basis of our proposal.

V. Assessment of Previous Theories

Li and Thompson (1981) treat the verbal suffix -le as the marker for perfective aspect, the function of which is to indicate a bounded event. There are essentially four ways in which an event can be bounded: (1) by being a quantified event, (2) by being a definite or specific event, (3) by being inherently bounded because of the meaning of the verb, and (4) by being the first event in a sequence. It is apparent that Li and Thompson attempt to unify the various uses of -le by appealing to the notion of 'boundedness'. The first two uses of -le above, however, are readily accounted for if -le is treated as a marker of realis. The third use of -le, i.e. with verbs which have the end point included in their meaning, is in fact quite problematic. To begin with, we note that the verbs they cited such as sǐ 'to die', wàng 'to forget' and miè 'to extinguish' are all followed immediately by -le in sentence-final position. Such occurrences of LE are at best ambiguous and more likely than not, they are instances of the change-of-state particle le. Secondly, the verbs cited are monosyllabic. If what follows is indeed a verbal suffix -le, the occurrence is in fact expected, without resorting to the idiosyncratic nature of the individual verbs; since, as pointed out earlier, monosyllabic action/event verbs tend to combine with this realis marker in a narrative to recount past happenings. The fourth use of -le is comparable to our analysis of -le as a marker of anteriority. The major problem with Li and Thompson's analysis, as is evident from their sample sentence, is that it deals primarily with isolated utterances, thus preventing them from discovering the narrative use of -le, i.e. as a marker of a culminating (peak) event.

Let us now turn to Andreason's treatment (1981) of -le, which is essentially an application of Li and Thompson's analysis of the suffix to written narrative fiction. The following is excerpted from Lu Xun's short story Yào 'Medicine':

(27) a. Hua Laoshuan hūrán zuò-qǐ shēn
Hua Laoshuan suddenly sit-up body

b. cā-zhe huǒchái
strike-ZHE match

c. diǎn-shàng biàn-shēn yóulà-de dēngzhǎn
light-on whole-body grease-DE oil-lamp

d. cháguǎn-de liǎng-jiān wūzi-lǐ biàn mǐmàn-le qīng-bái-de guāng
tea-house-DE two-M room-inside thus fill-LE green-white-DE light

'Hua Laoshuan suddenly sat up [and], striking a match, lit the completely grease-covered lamp. The two rooms of the tea house thus were filled with greenish-white light.'

Four events are narrated in this short excerpt: Hua's suddenly sitting up, his striking a match, lighting the oil lamp, and the two rooms becoming filled with light. Clause (b) is marked for the imperfective by the suffix -zhe and serves as a piece of background information to the events expressed in (c) and (d). The use of -le is thus ruled out here. Among the three 'kinetic' events in (a), (c) and (d), only the last is marked with -le. Andreason's explanation is that the presence of the 'highly quantified object qīng-bái-de guāng 'greenish white light' in (d) demands the occurrence of -le even in the clearly established past-time context of (27). We wonder, however, why the equally 'highly' quantified object biàn-shēn yóulà-de dēngzhǎn 'completely grease-covered oil lamp' does not require the use of -le aften diǎn-shàng 'light up' in (c). Now the events represented in (a) and (c) are in fact temporally sequenced before the event signalled in (d). Therefore, -le as a marker of anteriority could potentially be used in both (a) and (c). The non-use of -le after diǎn-shàng 'light up' in (c) is well justified on discourse grounds. It is a sub-event of an event line, containing another sub-event, the one in (d). This is further verified by the presence of the consequent conjunction biàn 'thus, right away' in (d) and by the collocation of the verbs. In terms of discourse, then, the two clauses form a close-knit unit. Use of -le in (c), though permissible in terms of syntax, would in fact break the unit into two separate events, thus rendering the passage 'choppy'. This explains why a -le is not used by the author in this position. The use of -le after mǐmàn 'fill up' should be obvious by now. It is indeed needed to mark (d) as the culminating and thus most prominent of the sub-events represented in (27). This is again the discourse function of -le to mark the peak clause of a segment, as we pointed out earlier. The non-use of -le in (a) is puzzling to us. According to our hypothesis, since zuò(-qǐ) 'to sit up' does not collocate with the other verbs, it cannot be

considered a sub-event and it requires a -le to explicitly indicate its position in the sequence. But, for some reason, the -le is not present. We will conduct a survey on it among native speakers and hope to report on it in a future paper.

We hope that we have demonstrated that our analysis is made on a broader and more practical basis than previous studies. Our explanations seem to be more natural, though less precise since they were formulated in terms of tendencies in discourse.

VI. Conclusion

In less technical terms than the hypothesis postulated in Section II above, we wish to summarize our findings in five plain statements:

(28) a. The verbal -le is basically used with an action/event verb to denote that the action/event occurred in a relative past-time frame.

b. In a sequence of sub-events, only the last 'culminating' one need be marked by -le.

c. -Le is used to explicitly mark temporal and logical anteriority of one action/event to another if they are not sub-events of a broader event.

d. Monosyllabic action/event verbs generally require the suffix -le.

e. Phrases with a classical flavor do not tolerate this suffix very easily.

But again, these are not rules, but tendencies, which allow considerable variation, depending on the organizational preference of the speaker/writer. Furthermore, there is a style which may very well be compared to the English historical present. In this style, no -le is used with the culminating peak event unless the verb is a monosyllabic action/event verb.[5]

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Notes

*A preliminary version of this paper with a slightly different title was presented at the 1985 Annual Convention of the Chinese Language Teachers Association in New York City, November 28 - Decmeber 1, 1985. We owe many comments and suggestions to Professors Charles Alber, James Tai, Charles Tang and Shou-hsin Teng, all of whom discussed the paper at the Convention. Needless to say, all errors are our own.

1. Philip Davis of Rice University (personal communication) has recently come up with the notion of boundary marking for the perfective -le. He essentially proposes that the perfective -le marks the ending of an action/event and the beginning of a state, though this requires a much refined verb classification in Mandarin. His idea is similar but different from Thompson (1968 & 1970).

2. The use of the term 'peak' follows Hinds (1979).

3. For the definition of the terms, see Halliday (1985), pp. 310-313.

4. This -le occurred in my [Chu] own speech. I said to my wife:

X gàosule tāmen sānbǎikuài-qián lián mǎi fēijīpiào dōu bú gòu.
tell-LE them 300-dollars even buy airplane-ticket all not enough
'X told them that 300 dollars isn't even enough for the airfare.'

when she asked me how come I received a check for $350 instead of the $300, which had been promised as an honorarium for a talk in Houston.

5. We examined 6 volumes of Zhongguo Chengyu Gushi and found this style to be thoroughly followed through.

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